

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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R 221826Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0872

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 03041

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO DEFENSE FOR SECRETARY
BROWN AND ASSISTANT SECRETARY MCAULIFFE

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: UK, AWACS, GW, MILI, OCON
SUBJECT: NATO AEW -- AWACS

REFS: A) LONDON 2937 B) USNATO 0933

SUMMARY. SOME UK OFFICIALS -- EXPRESSING DISMAY AT
PROSPECT THAT NATO AEW HAS REACHED A CRITICAL POINT
WITHOUT GAINING FULL NATO ENDORSEMENT -- HAVE SUGGESTED
THAT IN WAKE OF LIKELY FAILURE TO AGREE ON AWACS IN
MARCH, THE UK SHOULD BRING FORWARD THE RAF'S AIR STAFF
TARGET 403 AND SELECT USAF F-16 AIRCRAFT TO MEET IT.
END SUMMARY.

1. A SUGGESTION HAS BEEN PUT TO US THAT WE AND UK
SHOULD BE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING HOW TO "GET OUT OF THE
MESS" WHICH FAILURE TO AGREE ON AWACS BY THE END OF
MARCH WILL CREATE FOR NATO. AT FEB 17 DINNER HOSTED
BY POL-MIL ATTACHE, SENIOR MOD OFFICIALS WHO INSIST ON
ANONYMITY AND CLASSIFYING THEIR REMARKS AS "PERSONAL,
UNOFFICIAL AND UNAUTHORIZED," PUT THE FOLLOWING SUG-
GESTION TO MINISTER AND POL-MIL ATTACHE AS SOMETHING
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"WORTH THINKING ABOUT."

2. THE SCENARIO DRAWN FOR US GOES AS FOLLOWS. ASSUME
NO DECISION IS MADE TO GO FOR AWACS IN MARCH; ASSUME
CETERIS PARIBUS THAT UK IS IMPELLED TO GO FOR NIMROD
AS A CONSEQUENCE, AND THAT US HAVING ALREADY CHOSEN
AWACS WILL DEPLOY AT LEAST 7 USAF/A-35 FOR EUROPEAN

COVERAGE AND 2 FOR ICELANDIC COVERAGE, THEN WHAT MIGHT BE DONE IN CONTEXT OF THESE ASSUMPTIONS TO HEAD OFF BRITAIN FROM GOING FOR NIMROD?

3. OUR FRIENDS DEVELOPED THEIR ARGUMENT MAKING THE FOLLOWING POINTS: (A) FOR NATO AEW REQUIREMENT, AWACS IS THE ONLY SENSIBLE SOLUTION; (B) COST-EFFECTIVENESS, OPERATIONAL, MAINTENANCE/SUPPORT, TRAINING AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS ALL POINT TO THE GOOD SENSE OF HAVING AWACS SINCE NATO WOULD DERIVE VERY IMPORTANT BENEFITS FROM UPGRADING ITS AEW CAPABILITY; (C) SINCE USAF HAS OPTED FOR AWACS, THE ALLIANCE SHOULD GET USAF TO PROVIDE AEW TO NATO AS "AN AMERICAN FUNCTIONAL SPECIALITY"; (D) THE EUROPEAN ALLIES SHOULD CONTRIBUTE PRO-RATA/FAIR SHARE TO SUSTAIN OPERATIONAL COSTS AND SHOULD PAY FOR AIR-GROUND INTERFACE COSTS; AND (E) THE NORTH AMERICAN AEW MISSION WOULD HAVE TO BE SUBORDINATED TO THE NATO/EUROPEAN/ICELANDIC MISSION AND A MAJOR PORTION (IF NOT ALL) OF THE USAF A-3 AIRCRAFT WOULD HAVE TO BE ASSIGNED TO AUGMENT THE 7 A-3 AIRCRAFT PLANNED AT PRESENT TO BE THE US CONTRIBUTION TO THE CURRENTLY PROPOSED NATO AEW FORCE OF 27 AIRCRAFT.

4. WITH THESE POINTS AS BACKGROUND, THE FOLLOWING SCENARIO COVERING "A MEANS" FOR GETTING HMG TO BACK OFF FROM BUYING NIMROD WAS DRAWN FOR US: (A) THE RAF'S SHACKLETON FORCE IS GROTESQUELY OVER-AGED AND MISSION CAN EFFECTIVELY BE DONE BY AWACS OR NIMROD; (B) TIME CONSTRAINTS ARE COMPELLING AND RAF CANNOT

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WAIT MUCH LONGER FOR SHACKLETON REPLACEMENT; (C) NIMROD CAN BE KNOCKED OUT BY HMG SIMPLY DECIDING TO ELIMINATE RAF ROLE IN AEW MISSION; (D) IF THIS IS ACCEPTED, THEN HMG CAN ARGUE THAT RAF SHOULD UNDERTAKE SOME OTHER FUNCTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY, SHIFTING MONIES EARMARKED FOR AEW TO THE "NEW FUNCTION"; (E) IF (C) AND (D) ABOVE ARE ACCEPTED, THEN HMG WOULD BE FREE TO BRING FORWARD NOW THE RAF'S AIR STAFF TARGET (AST) 403 WHICH, UNDER PRESENT BUDGETARY CONSTRAINTS AND PLANS FOR SPENDING FALLS WELL INTO THE DISTANT FUTURE, IN PART BECAUSE OF PROPOSED SPENDING ON AEW.

5. THE CENTRAL SUGGESTION OUT TO US IS TO BRIDGE (A) UK AEROSPACE AND TRADE UNION DISSATISFACTION WHICH CANCELLATION OF NIMROD WILL GENERATE AND (B) THE REAL AND COMPELLING IMPERATIVES FOR "NIMROD REPLACEMENT WORK,"

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED ABOVE ADDRESSEES.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 03041

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WITH A HIGH TECHNOLOGY AIRCRAFT PROGRAM PROVIDING A MOLE
SCOPE FOR UK INDUSTRIAL PARTICIPATION WHICH, AT THE
SAME TIME, WOULD GIVE US SUBSTANTIAL FOREIGN EXCHANGE
EARNINGS TO COMPENSATE IN PART FOR "LOSS" OF NATO
AWACS. THIS AIM COULD BE MET BY SATISFYING AST 403
REQUIREMENT WITH US F-16 OR F-18 (IN LAND-BASED CON-
FIGURATION) AIRCRAFT. SOURCE SAID F-16 IS MORE LIKELY
TO BE PREFERRED BECAUSE USAF HAS IT AND A EUROPEAN
CONSORTIUM CENTERED ON IT EXISTS.

6. COMMENT: THE SENIORITY AND PAST EXPERIENCE OF THE
MOD OFFICIAL MAKING THE ABOVE SUGGESTION LEADS US TO
BELIEVE THAT IT SHOULD BE TREATED AS A SERIOUS TRIAL
BALLOON. ALTHOUGH EMPHASIS WAS PUT ON POINT THAT SUG-
GESTION IS "UNAUTHORIZED" WE CONSIDER IT IS UNLIKELY
THAT IT REFLECTS ONLY THE THINKING OF OUR SOURCE.
CERTAINLY, THE SOURCE IS FULLY AWARE OF THE TACTICAL
AIRCRAFT FIGHTER REQUIREMENT DIALOGUE WITHIN IEPG AND
IS KEENLY AWARE OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF "EUROPEAN VERSUS
AMERICAN" SOLUTION TO THE REQUIREMENT. AT THE SAME
TIME, HE IS AWARE THAT USAF PLANNING ENVISAGES A
FURTHER BUY OF F-16S; ALSO HE KNOWS THAT IF THE /UK WERE
TO SELECT THE F-16 IT WOULD BE CONTRIBUTING TO THE
FURTHERING OF STANDARDIZATION AROUND AN AIRCRAFT WHICH
FOUR NATO COUNTRIES HAVE ALREADY SELECTED.

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7. THE TIMING OF THIS SUGGESTION -- COMING AS IT DOES
A FULL MONTH AHEAD OF THE PROPOSED 23 MARCH MEETING OF
DEFENSE MINISTERS -- UNDERSCORES THE HEAVY PESSIMISM
HERE THAT NATO AWACS "WON'T TAKE OFF." SHOULD THE
PLAY OF TIME AND CIRCUMSTANCE CONVERGE TO SPOIL THE
BENEFITS FOR NATO OF A NATO AEW PROGRAM, THEN IT MIGHT
BE USEFUL WE BELIEVE TO APPROACH THE BRITISH ON THIS
MATTER. WE DO NOT RECOMMEND, HOWEVER, ANY APPROACH
BEFORE THE END OF MARCH AS THIS BRITISH SUGGESTION IS
PREMISED ON THE ASSUMPTION OF MONEY BECOMING AVAILABLE
IN LIEU OF SPENDING ON AEW. HOPEFULLY ON THAT SCORE
EVENTS WILL TAKE SUCH A TURN TO ALLOW UK AEW MONIES
TO BE SPENT AS ORIGINALLY PLANNED -- ON NATO AWACS.

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